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Mrs Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Mr Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President

Brussels, 22 June 2020

Subject: Joint Call to empower cities and regions in the Climate Pact and mobilise all actors towards decarbonisation

The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak and its economic and societal impacts require us to rethink the kind of economy we wish to recover. The vision of the European Commission president von der Leyen is clear: “By using the European Green Deal as our compass, we can turn the crisis of this pandemic into an opportunity to rebuild our economies differently and make them more resilient”. The role of local and regional actors, through initiatives such as the Climate Pact, will be essential in Europe’s recovery efforts.

Achieving ambitious climate objectives requires the engagement of all government levels, as well as that of all actors at local and regional level, most notably citizens. All key actors – local authorities, private sector, knowledge providers, citizens - must be on board in the efforts towards decarbonisation. Such an ecosystem approach is essential to ensure local ownership and working towards the same, ambitious goal. The European Climate Pact, as a part of the European Green Deal, offers the best opportunity to strengthen such collaboration and succeed in the green transition.

The undersigned associations, represent more than 2,000 local and regional authorities and elected governments, over 3,500 electricity companies, as well as hundreds of universities, civil society organisations and educational and research institutions, all supportive of a net-zero emission EU Economy by 2050. The electricity sector is willing to contribute to EU-wide decarbonisation efforts through energy efficiency measures and electrification, coupled with carbon neutral power. Fostering citizens’ engagement and incentivising in-depth behavioural changes will also be paramount for achieving a truly sustainable society. Collectively we have been working to promote the green transition, equip workers and learners with the necessary skills and competences for the green economy, support research and innovation, as well as provide all citizens with green technologies to heat their homes or use clean mobility solutions, allowing in turn environmental benefits, economic opportunities, and improved well-being for citizens in cities and regions.

We jointly agree that achieving climate neutrality by 2050 requires the contribution of everyone within the framework of the European Climate Pact. In view of the COP26 in November 2021, we encourage the European Commission to swiftly design and implement the European Climate Pact. It is even more crucial now that the coronavirus crisis has proven both the great capacity of people to communicate and the need to leave no citizen behind. Many local and regional innovation ecosystems have responded to the outbreak rapidly; the aftermath of the crisis is an opportunity to co-create a greener and more just society.

Therefore, we call on the relevant European institutions to make the Climate Pact successful through:

1. Triggering concrete measures in cities and regions across Europe

The signatories of this call represent key stakeholders that have already committed to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 or well before. Climate actions harnessing the benefits of energy efficiency and clean, renewable, carbon neutral electricity can bring significant benefits in cities and regions, including healthier and cleaner environment as well as improved air quality. In order to further support decarbonisation efforts at local level, the Climate Pact should support local energy alliances of public and private actors that encourage the sharing of best practices, stimulate multi-stakeholder partnerships, and incentivise the co-creation of climate-friendly solutions.

Stakeholder engagement will be vital to success. The successful local initiatives implementing practical measures should be widely spread across Europe, mobilising others through e.g. peer-to-peer learning, networking opportunities, knowledge exchange, advisory services, funding opportunities and provided support to scale-up the good practices. This can be well achieved through a reformed Covenant of Mayors initiative, turning it into a mutual learning lab.

A just transition needs a skilled local workforce in cities, regions as well as on islands. Usually, utilities try to employ a capable, local workforce, which is well trained in the energy technologies, able to install, maintain, and operate innovative technologies, such as storage, micro-grids, smart grids or new digital services.

Cities and regions are powerful facilitators and accelerators of local partnerships, including initiatives to provide citizens with job opportunities as well as innovative electricity solutions for their homes, cars and energy consumption. The Climate Pact should focus on the well-being of citizens in cities, regions and islands, aiming to coordinate these actions at EU level and encourage significant GHG reductions across Europe. A specific EU budget line should aim at supporting this governance engineering around climate action, by providing local and regional authorities with the right resources to encourage public-private partnerships and coordinate the process.

2. Mobilising the whole society along the way towards climate neutrality

The Climate Pact should be transparent and accessible, allowing trusted dialogues and awareness-raising on energy efficiency, climate, and environmental actions. The Climate Pact is people and their daily life and its design must ensure that everyone can find the relevant information as well as the opportunities to gain skills and/or to engage in sustainable projects.

A strong political will of the European Commission is crucial to guarantee lasting partnerships within the Climate Pact. The climate emergency calls for extensive cooperation between solution providers, operators, managers, politicians and the scientific world.

In order to achieve this, local and regional authorities need to develop new skills in order to embrace their role as facilitators between different stakeholders. A broad support base within society; among citizens, NGO's, the knowledge providers and the private sector must be ensured through continuous engagement as well as the promotion and wide acceptance of a green culture.

3. Building on existing initiatives

A large number of local initiatives already gather local and regional governments and agencies, private stakeholders and citizens towards common objectives. The Covenant of Mayors and the Clean Energy for EU Islands are important drivers of this collaboration and learning. The Climate Pact should act as an umbrella initiative and inspire from the experience of these local actions, replicate their best features and scale-up their positive impacts on citizens. The Climate Pact can map, connect and reinforce these initiatives and related actions, ensuring joint work towards a common goal.

4. Ensuring a goal-driven Climate Pact

The European Climate Pact should act as a catalyst for existing European climate and energy policies and only promote actions, strategies and projects that are compatible with the climate objective defined in the European Green Deal and the European Climate Law. Therefore, the pact's primary goal should be to ensure that all sectors and actors engage in the decarbonisation process and to coordinate actions at the local, regional and national level across Europe.

The European Commission foresees targeted support in energy efficiency for buildings, sustainable mobility as well as tree-planting. A broader scope of support needs to be considered and may include supportive measures to strengthen multi-stakeholder governance, tackle the distributional effects of climate and energy policies, ensure the upskilling and reskilling of workers and define new curricula and appropriate educational and training programs for the green economy, stimulate research and innovation and its impact on developing the green solutions, boost the deployment of low-carbon technologies as well as contribute to low-carbon projects, strengthened grids and sector coupling.

We, the signatories representing numerous actors of the society, propose to act as connectors and facilitate the knowledge sharing through our platforms in order to contribute to reaching the carbon-neutrality goal and a green and just society.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of

